

CHAPTER XXX.

By nine o'clock that same evening Amy and I were at the Northern Gate of the city, and there, close at hand, we found Krapatkin's *troika*, or three-horsed sledge, in waiting, the driver most anxiously expecting Amy's appearance, for as he told us with tears in his eyes his poor master's goods and serfs—all that were found in his Moscow house—were forfeit to the Tsar, and in order to keep tryst with us he had been obliged to leave home early and to wait about in the streets until it was time to be at his place of appointment, otherwise both he and his horses would by this time have been claimed by the Tsar's men.

"If thou art anxious to be out of Moscow we are even more so," said I. "Therefore drive as though the evil one were behind thee to catch thy soul."

And drive he did, right well.

Meanwhile there was stir at the terem. The hour came at which the ladies were wont to

retire to bed, nine o'clock, and to the consternation of the duenna whose duty it was to see all the rules of the establishment strictly kept, news was brought her that the Anglichanka had not returned home.

"How? Not returned? When went she forth—stay, she attends the Tsar, be sure. No maiden would be out of doors at this time; it is impossible!"

Had the duenna only guessed it, there were many such impossibilities constantly performed by the ladies under her charge, unseen and unguessed by herself.

"She went forth," said Maria Nagoy, "late in the afternoon, when she returned from the Tsar's presence. His grace should know of this. I think he will not approve such conduct, even from the witch-Anglichanka!"

Ten o'clock came and none had retired to bed, for Amy had not appeared, and all were too much interested in this matter to think of sleeping. Maria sent a messenger for one of her brothers, Afanassy, who lived close at hand.

When the boyar arrived he was closeted with his sister awhile in close consultation; and when this was over Nagoy left the terem in order to present himself at the Tsar's quarters.

"He goes to acquaint the Tsar with the disgraceful conduct of the Anglichanka," said Maria. "Is it not scandal enough that she shows herself openly in the streets at all hours? but to be abroad at night!"

"If the boyar is going to tell the Tsar of Amy's absence, he is a bold man," said Olga. "Keep an eye upon his dubina, boyar!" she added.

"Some one must go; and frankly I would it were not I!" replied Nagoy.

He went, nevertheless, but found that the Tsar had already retired to sleep.

"He must be summoned," said Nagoy; "I have news of importance."

"Is it good news?" asked the page in attendance; "if not, be warned and let it be told to-morrow!"

"Good or bad it must be told to-night; you shall wake the Tsar, my friend."

"Oh, I dare not!" said the youth, paling. "There is another, an Oprichinnik, who waits even now with bad news which, says he, should be told the Tsar—some story of the Anglichanka, for whom his Grace has lately developed a foolish spring madness—but how should I dare wake him from sleep to tell him such a tale?"

"Dear Saints!" exclaimed Nagoy, crossing himself, "and what then is this tale?"

"This fellow, the Oprichinnik, declares that being at about nine o'clock in the neighbourhood of the Northern Gate, he distinctly saw the Anglichanka come with that long English rascal, whose name I forget, but who was imprisoned by the Tsar and escaped by grace of Krapatkin (who has since expiated the offence). There was no mistaking either, says my man, for he had seen the lady more than once, and was one of those who arrested the long Englishman. Well, these two entered a great sledge, a boyar's equipage, which there awaited them, and bade the driver let the horses go as though the devil himself were in pursuit."

"Has not the man made a mistake?" said Nagoy, half frightened and half overjoyed, for if this were true it would be a dangerous matter to inform the Tsar of it, which duty might probably devolve upon himself; and yet, if the Anglichanka had really done this, why, here was an end of her interference between Maria his sister and the Tsar, Amy being an obstacle to Maria's greatness and, indirectly, to his own, so great that it had come near to overtopping altogether the edifice of the Nagoy ambitions.

"Nay," replied the page, "how can I tell whether the fellow speaks truly or falsely; he shall tell his own tale when the Tsar is told!"

"Ay, he shall tell it himself," said Nagoy, much relieved. "Nevertheless, my friend, I think the Tsar will not readily forgive us if we withhold this news one moment longer than is necessary. Go, summon the Oprichinnik; then his Grace must be awakened, and that done, if thou art afraid, leave the rest to me and to this common fellow to whose tale my own is a kind of corroboration."

So the young page, full of terror for his mission, went and roused the Tsar, who might be heard from the anteroom angrily demanding of the disturber of his peace the reason for his awakening, and the timid voice of the page, who replied that the Boyar Nagoy and another, an Oprichinnik, had news which must be told the Tsar at once, but as to which he himself knew nothing, only that these two men insisted. Thus the page escaped the danger he feared, and the wrath of the Tsar was reserved for others. Upon the Oprichinnik fell the brunt of it. For when he had told his tale and his Grace had caused him to repeat it, word for word, the Tsar suddenly fell upon him with his dubina,

cudgeling him so soundly that the wretched fellow yelled for his life and limped away in full howl, wounded and scarcely able to drag himself from Cæsar's presence."

"Now for thy tale," said his Grace, turning furiously upon Nagoy.

"Tsar," said Nagoy, standing boldly, for the Nagoyes are no cowards, "if I bring bad news, I err not in lack but rather in excess of zeal for thy service."

"Thy tale, thy tale," said the Tsar.

"'Tis only that the Anglichanka has not returned to-night to the terem. My sister——"

"Oh! thy sister and thou together—there we have the kernel of it. Thinkest thou, Nagoy, that I see not through these fool's tricks of thine and hers? Amy is an obstacle to her greatness and thine, therefore this tale is trumped up to set my heart against an innocent woman; come, confess quickly, it is a lie from the beginning—is it not? The girl Amy has been hidden away by thy sister and thee, or thy brothers, that she may not stand between Maria and her ambitions."

The Tsar stood glaring and panting, his tongue moistening from time to time his lips, which trembled with passion or with agita-

tion. Nagoy remained silent, standing with bent head before him, his eye, nevertheless, upon the dubina which was held by the Tsar's trembling hand.

"Speak, Nagoy," said Ivan. "Tell me this soldier's tale is a lie, and by the God who made us both and whose Name be glorified for ever, thou shalt be the greatest boyar in my realm."

"Tsar, I would to Heaven I could say the words thou desirest to hear. I was not at the gate and cannot therefore corroborate this man's tale, though his is a corroboration of my own. Shall I prove my zeal? Let the Tsar say the word and I will ride this very hour in pursuit. If I should bring back this Englishwoman alive then shalt thou believe that we Nagoy's have had no hand in her disappearance. Shall I ride, Tsar?"

"Yes—ride, ride—take others with thee, three at least, for this Shadwell is great and strong, and he will be desperate. If thou find, Nagoy, that the Oprichinnik has spoken truly, and the girl——" The Tsar paused and sat down, too agitated to complete his sentence. For a moment the muscles of his body worked, his hands clasped and unclasped, the staff fell

with a clatter from his grasp, his mouth opened and closed, and his face twitched.

"The Tsar is ill," said Nagoy, "I will summon a——"

"If thou findest it thus," continued the Tsar, bracing himself suddenly and fixing upon the boyar a most malignant and terrible look, "thou shalt not leave of this Shadwell a piece of flesh so large as would feed a crow—dost thou fully understand me?" Nagoy bowed his head.

"It shall be as the Tsar commands," he said. "As for the maiden, she shall be brought back to Moscow."

Ivan uttered an exclamation of intense fury.

"Fool and idiot!" he cried; "I said not so, she shall be brought neither alive nor dead. She shall not be parted from her lover; with his dust shall mingle hers, and with his bones shall rot her own; cut them to pieces, both, Nagoy, and may God reject them! Dost thou understand me, Nagoy? With thy life thou shalt answer for thy obedience."

"I understand," said Nagoy, horrified with his mission, yet daring to utter no appeal for mercy. He would gladly, if he had dared, counsel the Tsar to allow these lovers to es-

cape where they would, so they returned not to interfere with his sister's ambitions.

"Go then, quickly. Stay! thou shalt count the pieces into which thy sword has carved this snake whom I have nourished in my bosom; for every piece there shall be a curse pronounced by my priests once a year, I swear it."

Nagoy returned to his house to prepare for departure. He roused his brother Alexis and told him all. Alexis grew pale first, then furious.

"By St. Cyril, brother," he cried, "thou art a knave if thou hast promised obedience to the Tsar's most damnable commands."

"What else should I do, fool, when the Tsar raves?"

"Slay the Englishman Shadwell, if thou wilt," continued Alexis, hastily dressing himself; "but by St. Michael and all his angels thou shalt not lay a finger upon the girl."

"Wilt thou then pose as her protector against the commands of Cæsar?" asked his brother.

"Ay, that I will indeed," cried Alexis. "I shall ride with thee, moreover, to see that neither thou nor another dishonour her by word or deed."

"God knows I would rather she lived and escaped over sea or whither she will," said the

elder brother; "only, if thou must be a fool, temper thy foolishness with wisdom, Alexis—what wouldst thou?"

"I have not yet thought, but she shall live, that I swear; and the Tsar shall not know it, that I swear also, for I will stick like a pig any man who blabs, even though it were my own brother."

"Who is the least likely to blab," laughed the elder Nagoy, "for Maria's sake, if not for thine and the girl's."

"Well, we shall see," said Alexis, still angry. "I will ride with thee, for I will trust no one who goes in fear of our Tsar-devil. Who is of our party?"

"Krimsky I thought of, and perhaps young Belsky."

And so it befel that soon after midnight there rode in pursuit of us four strong and determined men, the two Nagoys, Belsky, and Krimsky.